THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) Over the past several years the United States and Russia have been coordinating their efforts to check the proliferation in weapons grade nuclear material. The present agreement seeks to terminate production of plutonium at three sites in Russia thus contributing to the advancement of US-Russia non-proliferation objectives. This agreement is not expected to have an adverse effect on India's nuclear capability.

(b) Government remains fully committed to safeguard the country's security against all eventualities. Government considers a robust and viable nuclear option essential for our national security. As such India will not accept any constraints its nuclear option as long ys other countries remain unwilling to accept an obligation to eliminate their nuclear weapons within a time bound framework.

Visit of US Assistant Secretary of State to New Delhi

946. SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) Whether an American team led by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State visited New Delhi in the first week of September, 1997 on the eve of Prime Minister's visit to the U.S.;

(b) if so, the issues discussed with the team and the outcome thereof; and

(c) whether it was considered by Government as an exercise of controlling the damage done by Ms. Robin Raphel, his predecessor in office and also as a measure to improve relations after sorting out the problems arising from end of the cold war?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) This was the First visit to India by the new US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs after his appointment. It was therefore in the nature of an area-orientation visit. In meetings in India, he expressed the keen interest of the" new US Administration in improving relations with India and providing a thrust to bilateral cooperation. Issues like cooperation in law-enforcement, science and technology, economic and commercial links, environment and terrorism were discussed in detail during this visit.

Cross-Bordcr Tiring on Kashmir Borders

947. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that while Pakistan was talking of peace and friendly relations with India, cross-border firing and shelling on Kashmir borders including LOC and militancy perpetrated by Pak-agencies backed by ISI of Pakistan were accentuated during and on the eve of the recent Foreign Secretary level talks and the talks between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan held in New York during recent UN General Assembly Session; and

(b) if so, the details of such incidents during the past four months, indicating the number of persons, civilians, including women and children and militants and security personnel killed on both sides?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) and (b) Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism and its unprovoked firings along the Line of Control and the International Boundary in Jammu and Kashmir continue.

There were 1118 such incidents of firing during July-October, 1997 in which 32 civilians and 11 T.idian army personnel lost their lives. In the anti-terrorist operations undertaken by the security forces during this period, 338 militants were killed, while a large number were arrested or surrendered. 73 civilians were killed by terrorists during this period and 62 army personnel lost their lives in anti-terrorist operations.

Arrangement for Haj-1998

948. SHRI AHMED PATEL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the pilgrim quota for Haj-1998 has been fixed;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what is the quota of Gujarat therein; and

(d) the arrangements being made by Government and Haj Committee for Haj-1998?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) and (b) The quota for pilgrims' under the arrangements made by the Haj Committee for Haj-1998 has been fixed at 66,000.

(c) For Haj-1998, pilgrims' quota for Gujarat State has been fixed by the Haj Committee at 6325.

(d) Arrangements being made by the Government and Haj Committee for Haj-1998 include hiring of accommodation in Makkah, despatch of medicines for use in Indian dispensaries, deputation of approximately 300 Government personnel to Saudi Arabia, including a medical mission, air charter for transporting the pilgrims, preparation of pilgrim passes, and release of foreign exchange 31,000 accommodation units have already been hired in Makkah Partial advance of rentals has been paid to the landlords. Despatch of medicines is underway. Applications from the prospective deputation-ists have been received and are being processed. Action is underway to obtain visas. For the air charter, quotations received from various airlines are under scrutiny and the charter is expected to be finalised shortly. An orientation programme for Haj pilgrims will take place shortly. Booklets (Haj Guide) in Hindi, English and Urdu are under print.

Bangladeshi assistance to insurgents in Assam

949. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Willthe PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it has been reported that Bangladesh is assisting insurgents in Assam; and

(b) if so, the action proposed to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA .SINHA): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The Government do not have reports that the Govt, of Bangladesh is assisting insurgents in Assam. However, the Government is aware of reports that Indian insurgent groups including those from Assam have been able to misuse Bangladesh territory for their activities including sanctuary, movement of weapons etc. Government's serious concerns at such activities have been taken up with the Bangladesh authorities on a regular basis at high levels. The Govt, of Bangladesh has stated that it does not allow Bangladesh territory for sanctuary, transit, setting up of camps and carrying arms into India by any insurgent and that action is taken to drive out or arrest insurgents found on Bangladesh territory. The Govt, of Bangladesh has agreed to our request to hand over arrested Indian insurgents after due judicial processes are completed.

Protection to Indian Fishermen from the Thai Fishermen

950. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any steps to protect the Indian fishermen living off the Sunderbans in Bay of Ban-pi from attacks and robbery by Thai fishermen;